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Japan's Annual Southern Bluefin Tuna Catch Halved 2006

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Report Highlights:

At the 13th meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), Japan accepted a reduction in its annual fishing quota of southern bluefin tuna due to the Commission's conclusion that Japan had been overfishing the tuna for years. The new annual quota for Japan will be down by half to 3,000 metric tons and will be applied for five years from 2007.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Overview

At the 13th annual meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), Japan accepted a reduction in its annual fishing quota of SBT (SBT) due to the group's conclusion that Japan had been overfishing the tuna for several years. The new annual quota for Japan will be down by half to 3,000 metric tons (MT) from 6,065 MT this year and the sanctions will be applied for five years from 2007 (Table 1). The decision was made in a meeting of the CCSBT, a voluntary fishery management group made up of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the Philippines as a formal cooperating non-member (<http://www.ccsbt.org/docs/about.html>), in Miyazaki, Japan from Oct. 10 to 13 2006. The CCSBT is responsible for setting the total global allowable catch in SBT and allocating the total among members. At the meeting, Japan's overfishing was discussed and total quota reduced by 3,395 MT, which is 23% of this year's quota. While other countries' quotas were also reduced, due to the size of the cut placed on Japan it will take on 90 % of the total global reduction.

Table 1 Southern Bluefin Tuna Catch Annual Quota by Country			
Unit: MT			
Country	Quota 2007-2009 (Japan: 2007-2011)	Quota 2006	Balance
Japan	3,000	6,065	-3,065
Australia	5,265	5,265	0
Taiwan	1,000	1,140	-140
S. Korea	1,000	1,140	-140
NZ	420	420	0
Philippine	45	50	-5
S. Africa	40	45	-5
EC	10	0	10
Indonesia	750	800	-50
Total	11,530	14,925	-3,395

The magnitude of Japan's SBT overfishing varies by source. The Panel is said to have estimated the total overcatch at 178,000 MT over the past 20 odd years. Meanwhile, the Japanese Fisheries Agency inspected catches of SBT by Japanese boats at the end of 2005 and found they exceeded their quota by a total of 1,800 MT.

Also at the CCSBT meeting, the Government of Japan agreed to make improvements to its monitoring and enforcement policies. Deficiencies were noted, for example, in domestic catch reporting and with transshipments. These changes will no doubt be monitored for efficacy.

Quotas of Other CCSBT Countries and Global Catch

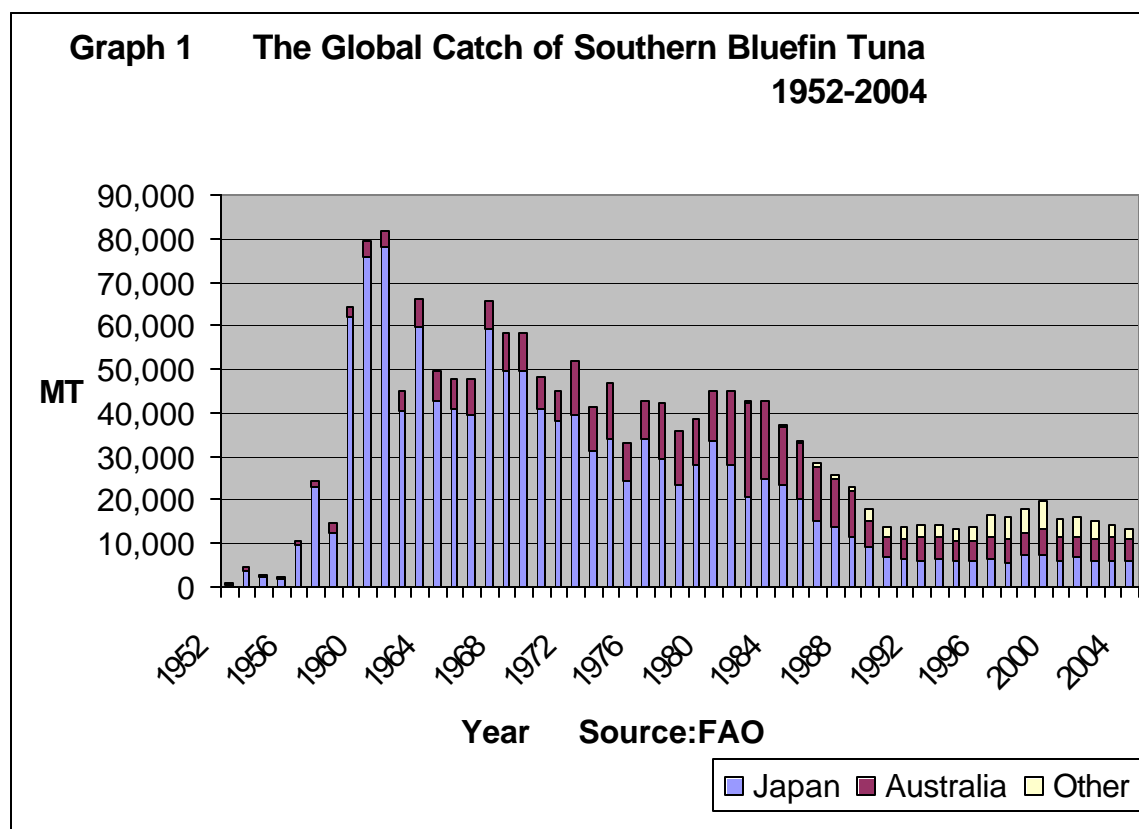
The quotas for Australia and New Zealand remain unchanged while those for Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, South Africa and Indonesia were changed slightly.

Australia's catching policy was also reviewed, at the request of Japan. At issue was the practice of catching juvenile fish, 20-30 kg, and transporting these young fish to farms where they are fattened for 6-8 months to 40-50 kg; the proportion of the fatty part (i.e. high value portion) increases from 10-20 % to 20-40 %. The weight at catch counts towards Australia's total quota. However, the Commission did not find enough evidence of wrongdoing to recommend a change to Australia's quota. Most of Australia's catch are exported to Japan. Import statistics show (Table 2) that Japan imported 8,741 MT from Australia in 2005.

Table 2 Japan Import of Southern Bluefin Tuna						
Country	2003		2004		2005	
	M \$	MT	M \$	MT	M \$	MT
--World--	136	8,239	150	11,362	128	9,774
Australia	114	6,368	130	9,738	118	8,741
Taiwan	9	992	11	1,090	6	766
New Zealand	5	261	4	229	3	147
Source: Japan Customs (WTA) M \$: Million US \$ MT: Metric Ton						
HS Code: 0302.36, 0303.46, 0304.10.192, 0304.20.094						

About 90 percent of SBT caught are consumed in Japan, yet official statistics show that Japanese catch of SBT only accounts for 3 percent of the 580,000 MT of tuna supplied to the Japanese markets annually.

The annual global catch of SBT started in 1952 and reached around 80,000 MT in the early 1960s. However, after peaking at average 60,000 MT in 1960s, the global catch of the bluefin tuna reduced rapidly to the average 42,500 MT in 1970s and then to 15,000 MT from 2000 to 2004 (Graph 1). Investigations by experts in CCSBT shows that bluefin tuna stocks have not increased since 1999 and there will be no mature tuna by 2030 if steps are not taken to reverse this trend.



Background and Impact of Japan's Quota Reduction

SBT is a high-end tuna species just behind bluefin tuna, which is high-end premium class. The fatty part of the tuna belly, a.k.a. toro, is the most prized and expensive part of the tuna and it is very popular in Japan in sushi and sashimi.

As a result of the overfishing of SBT this high end market could become even more expensive and exclusive. Some forecast that the cut in Japan's catch won't have much effect on tuna prices in the short run because despite Japan's overfishing it still did not supply the majority of SBT to the market. However, if Japan was catching an excess of 10,000 MT annually it seems likely the market will be hit. In addition, if traditional end-of-the year shoppers continue to purchase SBT for New Year celebrations supplies will dwindle further. The average wholesale price of fresh SBT in August this year at the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo was 2,581 yen per kilo, up by 22.7 percent over previous year. This movement has been attributed to the moderate growth in seafood consumption among health conscious consumers.

The quickest way to compensate for Japan's reduced catch is imports. However, it will be difficult to secure the necessary volume to make up for the amount of fish that was being caught. Another option under investigation for the past 30 years has been farming of tuna from an egg to adulthood. Some companies in Japan have already succeeded in raising bluefin tuna, yet volume is very limited.

As SBT are a southern hemisphere fish (SBT migrates to the southern hemisphere such as Indian Sea while bluefin tuna migrates to the northern hemisphere) and bluefin tuna exports from the United States are not significant this development should have no significant impact on exports of seafood from the United States.

Regulations of fish catches have been tightening for all tuna species due to worldwide declines in tuna species. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas will have their annual meeting in November 2006 to discuss resources of bluefin tuna.